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What to Read and Why

(An Outline of Reading with Commentary.)

AN ADDRESS

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The First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis maintains an absolutely free platform, so that the utterances therefrom do not commit the Society as a whole, but only the speaker.

In the following pages a brief outline is given of the subjects covered in the address "What to Read and Why," embracing those parts particularly which give direct reference to certain authors and books. It is hoped that this outline may be instrumental in opening the way to a practical reading course, covering in a general way the realm of human knowledge, to some persons who may heretofore have felt that they had neither the time nor resource to acquire such a store of general information.

A special price of two copies for five cents is made for this leaflet, for the reason that it gives the address in outline form only, and further that the outlines may have as wide a distribution as possible. Additional copies may be procured from the Publication Committee, Unitarian Laymen's League, 803 LaSalle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.

What to Read and Why

This little leaflet is for the purpose of suggesting a short course of reading which ought to be the foundation and frame work of every intelligent person's thought. Before one can read understandingly or think logically or act wisely he should so read as to have a clear cut outline of the universe of which he is a product and in which he lives, and of the main lines of human progress. He needs this outline as a sort of frame work of thought in which each nation, each great man, each great book, each great movement, may have its appropriate and logical place, so that his mind may be like an orderly room and not like a junk shop. A man is not educated because he knows a lot of facts. He is the educated man who knows what he wants to know, who knows where to find what he wants to know, and who knows what to do with it when he does find it. An educated mind is like a carpenter's tool chest in a well-regulated shop. It may not contain so very many finished facts but it is so arranged that the workman can put his hand readily upon the tool which he wants and can use that tool to shape whatever he will out of the raw material.

Now, every man needs just such an orderly outline of knowledge into which to put the isolated facts which he may be able to learn. Then everything will fall into its logical and proper order. When he learns something new he will know where to put it so that it will appear in its place as a part of the orderly whole. The trouble with most people is that the knowledge which they do acquire is much like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, all jumbled together. There is no beauty or order or meaning anywhere, because the fragments of their knowledge are out of all proper relation to one another. One must have a key to the drift and tendency of things before he can understand which way they are moving and what it is all about. For this world is a world of growth. There is always a struggle going on between the lower and the higher, between the forces which try to arrest this growth and those which try to free it. This struggle is all pervasive, touching every phase of life. Great questions are always up for settlement—social, economic, political, moral, religious questions—and how shall the unthinking and

unread know in which way lies the hope of man? Thousands of people all the time and with the best possible intentions are conscientiously working against the best interests of humanity simply because they do not know better. For all the evil is by no means wrought by intentionally bad people. "Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart." Thoughtful people ought to read just as a pilot studies his chart, that they may know which way to steer.

With this thought in mind let me indicate an outline of reading which should give a person a general survey of the field and thus help him to read and study all things understandingly.

THE SOLAR SYSTEM.

You look out over the stars at night. You see the moon in her beauty; and you cannot help asking the question: How were all these led forth and marshalled in their present order? You do not want to look upon this as an inexplicable and incomprehensible wilderness. You want to place yourself amid the stars and the planets. How can you do it? If you can do no more, you can read the article

> "Nebular Hypothesis" (last edition Encyclopedia Britannica).

one of the best on this subject to be found anywhere. You can then understand how the worlds came to be arranged as they are, and how the cooling sun gave birth to his family of planets, of which the earth is one.

THE EARTH
and
THE BEGINNINGS OF LIFE.

And then this old earth, considered simply as one of the planets, is the stage on which this great life-drama of our race is being played. In some way out of the dust beneath our feet these wonderful bodies of ours have come. On the surface of this planet, in the shadow of its mountains, in the sight of its seas, rejoicing in its sunshine, beaten by its storms; laughing a little, shedding a few tears, thrilled by hopes, clouded by fears, awed by sublimities all about us, we pass our brief lives. Under a little mound of this same earth, with its grasses and flowers above us, our bodies again become a part of its dust. This beautiful old world is our home. Now, should not every intelligent man know something about it, where it came from, by what process it has been developed, and toward what far-away destiny it sweeps along its star-

attended pathway? Read some book, then, on Geology. If you have not time for a complete treatment of the subject, at least read

"Primer of Geology" (Geike); or
"Introduction to Geology" (Marr)

If you care to pursue the matter farther read

"Geology" (LeConte), and later
"First Principles" (Spencer).

And then when you have learned the general facts about the earth, you should know the marvellous story that science has to tell about the development of life upon our cooling planet, and by what steps it has climbed from the lowest primeval form until man appeared, the future master of his own and the earth's destiny. Here, again, if you can not go thru the more comprehensive treatises of the masters read

"The Development Theory" (Bergen), then
"Origin of Species" (Darwin), and later
"History of Creation" (Haeckel).

THE ORIGIN OF MAN.

Next you ought to know something about what kind of a creature man was at first, what he thought about himself and the universe, what was the starting point of his long journey across the ages and towards his present high outlook of civilization. If you can not go more deeply into it, at least read the remarkable little book

"The Childhood of the World" (Clodd); or
"The Mind of Primitive Man" (Boas).

If you have more time add to these such a book as

"Primitive Culture" (Tylor); or
"Early Civilization" (Goldenweiser), followed by
"Sociology, Vol. 1, Part 1" (Spencer).

Or if you have not time for any of this, all that I have suggested thus far is covered in a wonderfully interesting volume of 330 pages, called

"The Story of Evolution" (McCabe); or still shorter is
"Evolution: From Nebula to Man" 120 p. (McCabe)

which covers the whole story from the birth of the sun to historic man.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY.

And then you need to find out along what special lines of social, economic, political and religious progress the race has advanced, what things have hindered and what things have helped this advance. Then you will know enough—and few at present do know enough—to favor or oppose the right things. Most people fight blindly, and are in danger of doing as much harm as good, just because they do not know these things. To help you in this if you can not stop for more, read

"The History of Culture" (Hittel); or
"Sociology and Political Economy" (Abbott)

for remember that Sociology is the study of the sum total of human achievement, of how every social product has been created, and this is traced admirably in these little books. Of course, if you have more time take up the first volume of

"Sociology" (Spencer); followed by
"Intellectual Development of Europe" (Draper),

or any other standard works of Sociology. In this connection also one should be acquainted with the development of thought in the realm of philosophy. This can be gained from reading a very admirable little book

"A History of the Freedom of Thought" (Bury); or
"Schools of Philosophy" (Charles Shaw).

GROWTH OF MORALITY.

Another thing that you need to know is something of the growth of morality. The ideas of right and wrong were not spoken from out the sky to man; the ten commandments and all other legal restrictions are the wrought out results of human experience. Men found out by trying what was good for them in conduct, just as really as they did what was good for them to eat and what was poison. You need to become familiar with the world's experiments in the matter of right and wrong, that you may know how the one conduces not only to social order, but to the happiness, the welfare, and the prosperity both of the individual and of the world; that you may know that these moral laws are wrought into the very fibre, the web and woof of life itself. For this purpose read

"The History of Ethics" (Wheeler); followed by
"Data of Ethics" (Spencer);
"History of European Morals" (Lecky); and
"The Science of Ethics" (Stephen).

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION.

And in connection with this you need especially in these times to know the outlines of the origin and development of man's religious beliefs and customs. Most people in these matters are completely in the hands of ignorance and prejudice. They inherit their religion as they do the color of their hair, or they are guided by the drift of fashion or social convenience or pleasure. They hold the same ideas of religion that were held in the dark ages. They still believe that it is some final, absolute thing handed down from above. But religion is a progress from the lowest fetichism on and up toward the eternal light and truth. And until people know something of this development of religion there is no chance of saving the world. So if you would know the direction in which progress in religion lies read something about its origin, such as

"The Childhood of Religions" (Clodd); or
"Origin of Religion" (Lang); followed by
"The Growth of Religion" (McCabe); and
"The Next Step in Religion" (Sellars)

the latter an admirable book covering the whole field and indicating the probable future of religion; and then if you are interested to go further read

"Development of Religion" (Irving King); and
"Psychological Study of Religion" (Leuba).

GENERAL.

This really completes the course which I have in mind as forming the framework, into which all your reading would naturally drop into place. After completing this course one should read a few of the best books in those realms which are foremost in men's minds today, such as Economics, Psychology, and Chemistry. The following are suggested:

Economics:
"Democracy After the War" (Hobson);
"Problems of the New World" (Hobson);
"Acquisitive Society" (Tawney).
Psychology:
"Social Psychology" (McDougall);
"Reconstruction in Philosphy" (Dewey);
"Mind in the Making" (Robinson),

the latter a most remarkable book. And then if you

would be acquainted with some of the achievements of natural science read by all means

"Creative Chemistry" (Slosson).

If you can not read all of this then get a general outline of it all by reading

"The Outline of History" (Wells);

and if this is too much for you, for a real appreciation of Mr. Wells' "Outlines" presupposes some knowledge of these things, then get that most wonderful new book

"The Story of Mankind" (Hendrick Van Loon),

which was fascinating enough to keep me up most of the night. It was written for children, but I should hate to tell you how much I learned from it. It might be a reflection upon the maturity of my mind. You will understand something of the comprehensiveness of this volume when I tell you that the first sentence reads, "We live under the shadow of a gigantic question mark. Who are we? Where do we come from? Whither are we bound?" and the last sentence reads, "The moral of the story is a simple one. The world is in dreadful need of men who will assume the new leadership—who will have the courage of their own visions and who will recognize clearly that we are only at the beginning of the voyage, and have to learn an entirely new system of seamanship."

Such is my answer to the question: "What to Read and Why." I have not indicated any more than the busiest of you can do. You will not find it difficult, if you begin at the right end. And in the course of a few years you may know what the world is, where it came from, and by what process; what humanity is, by what pathways it has traveled, and which way it is going; and in which way lies your duty if you would help on a brighter future.